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PATENT APPLICATION

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FOR

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PLAYING A COOPERATIVE GAME

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TITLE: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PLAYING A COOPERATIVE GAME

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates generally to a board game, and more particularly, to a board game for two or more players wherein the players are not competing against each other but instead must cooperate to complete a common goal within a given amount of time.

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2. Description of the Prior Art

Board games, table top games and parlor games, are well known and have been universally used for centuries, many of these games utilizing common elements, such as a standard game board, 15 player markers, dice or other randomizing agents, timer mechanisms, cards, money and the like. What all of these games have in common is that each of the players, whether there be two or more, are competing against each other. In many of these games, the players might be grouped into two or more teams, but 20 in these instances, the teams themselves are competing against each other.

While there are other cooperative games on the market, none of them provides the specific features of the cooperative game of 25 the present invention. For example, in the game *Cranium Hoopla* all players (playing together as one team) attempt to successfully communicate a target number of content pieces to one

another using four different clueing methods within a set period of time.

Another such game is *Lord of the Rings*, a cooperative game published by Hasbro, Kosmos and Parker Brothers in 2000 where the object is to destroy the Ring while surviving the corrupting influence of Sauron. Each player plays one of the Hobbits in the fellowship, each of which has a unique power. The game is played on a number of boards: the Master board indicates both the physical progress of the fellowship across Middle Earth and the corrupting influence of Sauron on the hobbits, and a number of scenario boards which detail the events and adventures of particular locations. Progression across the boards is determined by playing cards (many of which represent the characters and items of Middle Earth), and the effects of corruption are represented by a special die. The game is lost if the ring-bearer is overcome by Sauron, or won if the ring is destroyed by throwing it into the volcanic fires of Mount Doom.

Another example of a semi-cooperative game is a game published in 1993 by Decipher, Inc. entitled *Star Trek--The Next Generation: A Klingon Challenge*. The game features some cooperative aspects (the extent of this is not known) and a game timer in the form of a constantly-running VHS videotape that players start at the beginning of the game.

There exists a need for a class of board games in which players cooperate in order to achieve a common goal, namely the opening of a safe allowing the players to simulate a heist while avoiding non-player tokens such as guards and dogs, within a 5 predetermined amount of time. As shall be appreciated, the prior art fails to specifically address either the problem or the solution arrived upon by applicant.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Against the foregoing background, it is a primary object of the present invention to provide a board game wherein two or more players or teams cooperate to achieve a common goal.

5 It is another object of the present invention to provide such a board game further including a timing mechanism for setting a deadline within which the players must achieve the common goal.

10 It is yet another object of the present invention to provide such a board game that may be completed in a predetermined period of time.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide such a board game that includes an element of randomness to the outcome of the game.

15 It is another object of the present invention to provide such a board game including one or more elements that operate independently of the players, which elements may influence the player game pieces or the player's achievement of the common goal.

20 It is yet another object of the present invention to provide such a board game including at least one non-player game piece positionable on the game board and moving independently of the players' game pieces, wherein said non-player game piece may influence the position of the player game pieces on the game
25 board, and the player game pieces may influence the position of the non-player game piece on the board.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide such a board game that includes a lockable safe mechanism that cannot be unlocked until all four keys are inserted, which keys are acquired by players by completing certain tasks.

5 It is but another object of the present invention to provide such a board game that is playable by two or more players.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide such a board game that is appropriate for a broad range of age groups.

10 It is but another object of the present invention to provide such a board game that allows players to simulate a heist.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide such a board game wherein players experience the thrill of competition without an adversarial atmosphere.

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To the accomplishments of the foregoing objects and advantages, the present invention, in brief summary, comprises a board game having a game board and a plurality of game pieces positionable on the board. The game board includes a continuous game path along which the game pieces may be moved, the game path being comprised of a series of spaces or tiles. At various 20 positions along the game path are provided one or more chambers or rooms, within which the game pieces may be moved. The game pieces include at least one player game piece positionable upon said the game path and at least one non-player token game piece 25 positionable upon the game path, wherein the token game piece moves independently of the players and the player game pieces.

The token game piece may influence the position of the player game piece on the game board and conversely, the player game piece may influence the position of the token game piece on the board. A timing mechanism is also provided for providing a

5 deadline within which the players must achieve a common goal prior to the expiration of time on said timing mechanism. The timing mechanism may be integrated within a lockable safe mechanism which cannot be opened until a certain number of "keys" are inserted into slots provided within the mechanism. When the

10 keys are all inserted, the safe mechanism may be opened and the game is won if the players complete the task prior to time running out on the timing mechanism. In an alternative embodiment, a single player may play an interactive game by using a puzzle book that includes puzzles that must be completed prior to opening a

15 mission book having mission solutions relating to the puzzles, wherein the missions must be completed within a certain predetermined period of time.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing and still other objects and advantages of the present invention will be more apparent from the detailed explanation of the preferred embodiments of the invention in 5 connection with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a perspective illustration of the board game of the present invention, including the elements disclosed in the preferred embodiment; and

FIG. 2 is a perspective illustration of the combination 10 timing mechanism/locking safe mechanism of the board game of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to the drawings and, in particular, to Fig. 1 thereof, the board game of the present invention is provided and is referred to generally by reference numeral 10. The board game 5 10 comprises a game board 12 which, in the preferred embodiment, is substantially planar and is foldable so as to fit within a smaller area, such as a storage box. At least one surface of the game board 12 contains a playing surface 14 upon which the game is played. The playing surface 14 includes a continuous game 10 path 16 comprising a plurality of connected spaces or tiles 18. At various positions along the game path 16 are provided chambers or rooms 20, said chambers 20 being connected to the tiles 18 by a door marker 22. One of said chambers 20 serves as the start/finish room 24 wherein play commences and ultimately 15 terminates.

A timing mechanism 26 is utilized to provide a deadline within which the players must achieve a common goal. The timing mechanism 26 illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2 is an electronic timer that counts down in a digital readout from 30 minutes to 0 upon 20 the commencement of the game. In the preferred embodiment, the common goal is the opening of a lockable safe mechanism 28 which cannot be opened until a given number of keys 30 are inserted into slots 32 in the safe mechanism. The keys 30 may take on any variety of shapes or forms, such as a plastic skeleton key or a 25 key imprinted on a plastic tile. Until all the required keys 30 are inserted within the slots 32 of the safe mechanism 28, however, the safe mechanism 28 cannot be opened, and play must

continue. It is only upon the successful acquisition of all the keys 30 and the unlocking of the safe mechanism 28 within the time frame provided by the timing mechanism 26 that the game is won by the players, not by competing against each other, but 5 rather by cooperating towards a common goal.

Game pieces 34 are utilized to represent the players as well as non-player characters and random events. The game pieces 34 include at least one player game piece 36 positionable upon the game path 16, which player game piece 36 is controlled by a 10 player or players. In the preferred embodiment, at least one non-player game piece 38 is also provided, which piece 38 is also positionable on the game path 16 and moves independently of the player game pieces 36. As will soon be appreciated, the non-player game piece 38 may influence the position of the player 15 game piece 36 on the game board 12 and conversely, the player or player game piece 36 may influence the position of the non-player game piece 38 on the game board 12.

The player game pieces 36 and non-player game pieces 38 are moved along the game path 16 a number of spaces 18 corresponding 20 to the results of a die or dice 40. In the preferred embodiment, the dice 40 comprise a player movement die 42 and a non-player movement die 44. In this embodiment, the player movement die 42 is an eight-sided die with numerical indicia 46 and graphical indicia 48 being provided on each of the faces. The numerical 25 indicia 46 represents the number of spaces 18 the player game piece 36 is to move, while the graphical indicia 48 represents a certain action either the player game piece 36 or non-player game

piece 38 must take. Also in this embodiment, the non-player movement die 44 is a six-sided die with numerical indicia 46 provided on each of the faces. It should be appreciated that the dice 40 are but one method of determining a random result, and 5 any number of alternative devices may be used, such as a spinner or electronic means.

In the preferred embodiment, the player game pieces 36 may be moved in any direction, while the non-player game pieces 38 follow a predetermined path 50 along the game path 16, said path 10 50 being established by a plurality of directional arrows 52. In the event that there is more than one non-player game piece 38, a different set of multiple directional arrows 52 may be used for each piece 38, each of which set may establish a different predetermined path 50 for each game piece 38.

15 Additional game pieces 34 are also provided in the preferred embodiment, which game pieces 34 are designed to fit in with the scheme of the board game 10. For example, in the preferred embodiment, in the initial setup of the game, the keys 30 are randomly imprinted on the bottom of top secret tiles 54, which 20 tiles 54 are placed on predetermined locations 56 in one or more of the chamber 20. The top secret tiles 54 are adapted to receive booby trap tiles 58 which are placed face down on the top secret tiles 54 so as to hide their identity from the players prior to being encountered. During gameplay, when a player game 25 piece 36 enters a room in which a top secret tile 54 holds a booby trap tile 58, the booby trap tile 58 is revealed and the player must "disarm" the booby trap revealed thereon. Once the

booby trap has been disarmed, the top secret tile 54 is flipped over, potentially revealing one of the keys 30 required to open the safe mechanism 28. The top secret tile 54 may contain other indicia on the bottom thereof, such as the key to a secret 5 passage or the occurrence of an event, such as the player being stunned.

In the preferred embodiment, tool cards 60 are provided to allow the players to "disarm" the booby trap revealed on the booby trap tiles 58. For example, if the booby trap tile 58 10 reveals a laser web, the tool card 60 required to disarm it would feature a deflection mirror. Other examples of corresponding traps and disarming tools include heat sensor and ice suits, glass cages and ice cutters, and barbed wire and wire cutters. The tool cards 60 may also include other indicia prescribing 15 actions required of the players, penalties or awards for the players, random occurrences and the like. For example, a lock pick tool card 60 will release a player game piece 36 from jail, or a jet board tool card 60 will allow a player game piece 36 to move double the die roll.

20 It should be noted that the embodiment shown in Figs. 1 and 2, in which the game board 12 is configured in the design of a spy complex that the players must sneak around in to recover the hidden keys 30 to unlock the safe mechanism 28, is but one representation of the fundamental concept of the board game 10 of 25 the present invention. The keys 30 do not need to consist of actual representations of keys, nor does the safe mechanism 28 have to appear as a safe, nor do the non-player game pieces 38

have to be a guard and his dog, etc. The concept of the board game 10 is to require the players to cooperate towards a common goal - the collection of one or more items using certain tools that may be transferred between players while avoiding non-player 5 game pieces 38 and overcoming obstacles, such as booby traps.

For example, the player game pieces 36 may be made in the representation of elves, and the safe mechanism 28 is designed to look like a magic cave, and the players must find four magic beans (the equivalent of keys 30) from within a cave complex to 10 place within the magic cave before the sun sets.

Furthermore, while the timing mechanism 26 in the embodiment shown is an electronic timer, this is but one method for setting a deadline in the game. Various other electronic devices will work just as effectively, as would a variety of mechanical or 15 kinetic devices. Simple tools such as spring wound timers or hourglass devices are well known in the game industry. Other timing devices more appropriate to the theme of the particular game are also envisioned, such as balls dropping down ramps, cars moving around a track, water filling a bucket, etc. All that is 20 required is that the timing device is relatively consistent in the setting of a deadline to complete the required task.

In actual gameplay, the game is set up by mixing up and randomly placing the eight top secret tiles 54 face-down onto the 25 marked spots 56 on the game board 12 10, and then by mixing up and randomly placing the eight booby trap tiles 58 face-down on top of the top secret tiles 54 . Each player is then randomly

dealt an equal number of tool cards 60. All twelve tool cards 60 are distributed (for four players, each get three, for three players, each get four, for two players, each get six). Once all the game pieces 34 and cards 60 are in place, the game is begun 5 by starting the timer in the timing mechanism 26. This timer begins counting down from 30 minutes, and does not stop until the game is over.

Each player controls one player game piece 36 token throughout the game. players begin the game with all of their 10 player game pieces 36 in the start/finish room 24, or "Safe Chamber." players take turns, beginning by rolling the dice 40 (on the first turn, the first player only rolls the player movement die 42.) The player movement die 42 determines the number of spaces on the game board 12 the player game piece 36 15 may move.

The player game pieces 36 may enter chambers 20 indicated on the game board 12. When a player game piece 36 is in a chamber 20 with a face-down booby trap tile 58, that player may turn over that tile to reveal its contents. The booby trap tile 58 must be 20 removed before the top secret tile 54 underneath it can be revealed. In order to remove the booby trap tile 58, players must meet the conditions required by the specific booby trap. In the preferred embodiment, these conditions include:

1. Playing the following tool cards 60 for the 25 corresponding booby traps:
 - a. Gas Mask for the Poison Gas
 - b. Bug Spray for the Killer Bees

- c. Ice Suit for the Heat Sensor
- d. Deflection Mirror for the Laser Web
- e. Wire Cutters for the Barbed Wire
- f. Glass Cutters for the Glass Case

5 2. Using the robot car 62 (not a tool card) for the Ring of Fire booby trap

 3. Having at least two player game pieces 36 in the same chamber 20 for the 500 Pounds booby trap

10 Top secret tiles 54 that are marked key 30 are removed from the game board 12 and kept by the player until the end of the game. Other top secret tiles 54 are left in place on the game board 12 when they are turned over. In the preferred embodiment, the top secret tiles 54 are as follows:

15 1. Four Keys (these are kept by the players as they are discovered)

 2. Two Secret Passages (these remain on the game board 12)

 3. One Empty (this causes no action)

 4. One Stunned (this causes the player who revealed it to lose one turn)

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One player begins the game with the robot car 62. This can be used on the player's turn to legally pass ONE tool card 60 to any other player. The robot car 62 can also be passed to another 25 player without a tool card 60. This is a key element to the cooperative nature of the game: players use the robot car card 62 to move resources to the player who can use them.

If a player rolls a graphical image 48 of a guard or dog on the player die, that player may not move his player game piece 36, but instead must place the guard token 64 or dog token 66 on the appropriate space indicating they are now in play. (If the 5 guard 64 is already in play when a player rolls guard, the guard 64 is taken out of play. If the dog 66 is already in play when a player rolls dog 66, the dog 66 is taken out of play.) Until these tokens are taken out of play, each player on his turn must roll the non-player movement die 42 in addition to the player 10 movement die 42. This determines the number of spaces the guard 64 and/or dog 66 are moved. These tokens always move along the same path, and always in the same direction (unless acted upon by a player using an appropriate tool card 60. The guard 64 and dog 15 66 send player game pieces 36 to Jail by being in the same corridor, or by being within six spaces 18 of a player game piece 36, respectively. In addition to the die roll, the guard 64 and dog 66 can be taken out of play by legal use of the appropriate tool card 60 (Telephone and Bone, respectively).

Players may escape from Jail by using the appropriate tool 20 card 60 (the Lock Pick), or by rolling an open lock on the player die on their turn, or by another player moving his player game piece 36 into one of the chambers 20 on the game board 12 marked Jail Release. Players may not send or receive the robot car 62 while in Jail.

25 If the players obtain all four keys 30 and move their player game pieces 36 successfully back to the start/finish room 24 before the timing mechanism 26 reaches zero, they may insert the

keys 30 into the lockable safe mechanism 28 and stop the timing mechanism 26 (as shown in FIG. 2). They have won the game. If the timing mechanism 26 reaches zero prior to the players completing their task, the game is over and the players have lost.

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Having thus described the invention with particular reference to the preferred forms thereof, it will be obvious that various changes and modifications can be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention as 10 defined by the appended claims. For example, a solo play game is envisioned whereby players must first complete puzzles contained in a puzzle book before opening a mission book containing various missions relating to the puzzles solved in the puzzle book. A timing mechanism 20 is utilized to provide a deadline within 15 which the missions must be completed.